

HAITI Food Security Outlook

April through September 2012

- Good levels of rainfall allowed farmers in most parts of the country to begin planting their fields as early as March. There is good progress in plant growth and development in the Southern, Western, and Central regions.
- With the lean season in full swing, consumers are dealing with seasonally high prices.
- Prices for imports, which are much more plentiful on local markets, are lower than prices for locally grown crops. The situation should improve by early June, with the spring harvest. Most poor households will experience no acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 1).
- In contrast to the abundance of rain in the Southern, Western, and Central regions, certain municipalities (*communes*) in the upper Artibonite, the Northwest, and the Northeast have been in the throes of a drought, which caused crops to fail in January and February in these areas, putting poor households in IPC Phase 2 (stressed).
- This year's hurricane season beginning in June, unlike the last two seasons, should be relatively quiet. However, the government is keeping a close watch and is prepared to intervene in the event of a hurricane strike in any part of the country.

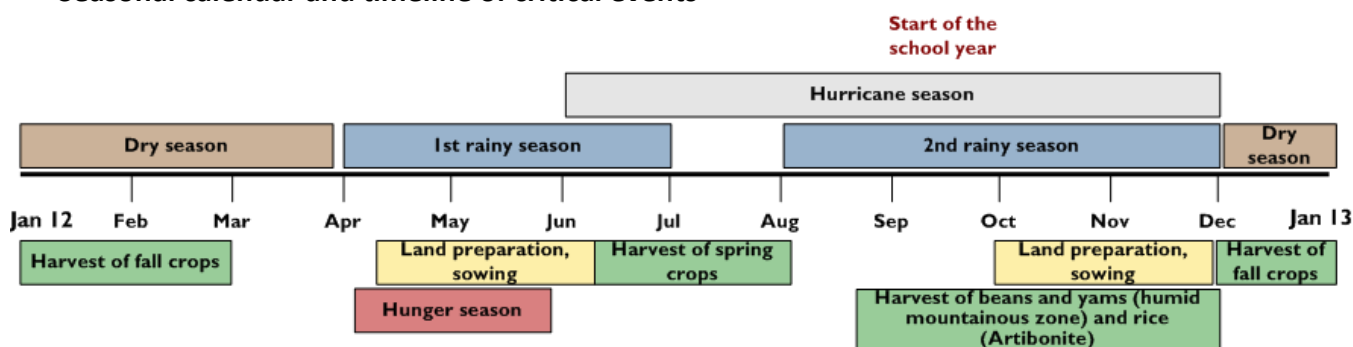
Figure 1. Current food security outcomes, April 2012



Source: FEWS NET

For more information on the food insecurity scale FEWS NET, visit: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Seasonal calendar and timeline of critical events



Source: FEWS NET

Most likely food security scenario for April through September 2012

The rainy season began on schedule in March/April throughout virtually all parts of the country, especially in the Southern, Western, Central, and Northern regions. There were reports of excess rainfall in the West and the North, which caused flooding, resulting in physical damage and human suffering. The planting of cereals and legumes continues in these parts of the country. Most of these crops should be ready for harvesting in June and July, though bean crops planted in March in wet mountain areas are expected to mature by May. Good harvests of perennial crops like bananas are expected over the next few months.

April also marks the beginning of the lean season, when on-farm reserves across the country are low if not completely depleted and markets are the main source of household food supplies. However, certain areas such as the far western

reaches of the Northwestern region and the Central and Northeast regions are facing a much longer lean season, which began in February/March after the failed or poor harvest of sorghum and pigeon pea crops in January/February.

For the most part, markets are well-stocked with food supplies consisting mostly of imports, which account for over 70 percent of market inventories. Prices are relatively stable, though higher than last year.

The government's resignation in February and the time required to install a new government are affecting food security conditions. With the budget for the fiscal year from October 2011 to September 2012 still not approved, the usual government assistance for farmers could come too late or may not be up to par. For example, compared with the 20,000 metric tons of chemical fertilizer available for purchase on the market at government-subsidized prices in February of 2010, this year's figure is down by 50 percent. As far as seeds are concerned, the Ministry of Agriculture planned to distribute only 140 metric tons of corn seeds to farmers in April of this year, compared with 300 MT in April of last year. These inputs should have been made available by at least the middle of March so that farmers could use them as soon as the rains began. Poor farmers depending on these seeds to plant their fields are either using poor quality seeds or are planting their crops late, in both cases, resulting in poor harvests. The Ministry is preparing to make massive quantities of bean seeds available for the summer growing season in wet mountain areas.

Harvests for the less important second rice-growing season in the Artibonite Valley are staggered throughout the month of April, but do not significantly affect rice prices at the country level. With supplies of chemical fertilizer unable to keep pace with demand, this year's harvest is expected to be below-average. The cost of a 50 kg sack of fertilizer at planting time in November of last year was triple the price in November of 2010. All the same, the rice harvest affords employment opportunities for unskilled farm laborers in rice-farming areas of the Artibonite Valley.

Basic assumptions for the period from April through September 2012

The following assumptions are based on current conditions and most likely future trends in the nationwide situation:

- Average levels of rainfall in all parts of the country will help facilitate crop production, resulting in an average harvest. This year's harvest will be larger than the harvest for last season, which was approximately 10 percent below-average. In fact, unlike last year, the rains got off to a timely start in most farming regions. The critical period for the growth and development of crops planted in March/April falls in May, which is generally rainy.
- Harvests for the current growing season will improve the availability of locally grown food crops on domestic markets beginning in June.
- Staple food prices will come down between June and September, as is generally the case at that time of year. Rice prices, driven by trends in world market prices, will also come down.
- The mango season will begin in May and run through June in practically all parts of the country, affording income-generating opportunities for all wealth groups.
- Rice farmers in the Artibonite will be confronted with high production costs for the main summer growing season. The government fertilizer subsidy has been reduced from 70 to 30 percent and global market prices are up. The cost of fertilizer on local markets is 250 percent higher than last year.
- The government subsidy for gas prices at the pump will be suspended during the outlook period, directly affecting the cost of transportation.

Figure 2. Projected food security outcomes for April-June 2012



Source: FEWS NET

For more information on the food insecurity scale FEWS NET, visit: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

Figure 2. Projected food security outcomes for July-September 2012



Source: FEWS NET

For more information on the food insecurity scale FEWS NET, visit: www.fews.net/FoodInsecurityScale

- Cholera rates could surge as of April/May with the beginning of the rainy season. However, the extension of current information and awareness-raising activities, the strengthening of treatment programs, and the pre-positioning of corresponding supplies, particularly in high-risk areas, could reduce the risk of a new outbreak.
- There is a possibility of flooding in the Artibonite (in Gonaives, Ennery, and the lower Artibonite), on the Southern peninsula (in Les Cayes, Camp Perini, Cotes Sud, and St Louis du Sud), and in the Northern (Limber, Cap-Haitien, and Grande Rivière du nord) and Western regions (Port-au-Prince and Logan) in May and September at the height of the first and second rainy seasons. This would damage crops, kill livestock, and slow shipments of supplies to market, seriously affecting food availability.
- The U.S. dollar will rise against the Haitian gourde during the outlook period, affecting the price of imports.

A good distribution of rainfall between April and June is certain to produce average harvests of corn, beans, cowpeas, and other crops such as tubers, breadfruits, and bananas. Food availability will improve as of June/July and markets will be well stocked with all types of crops. Poor farm laborers will have an opportunity to find work either in the harvest or in land preparation activities for the summer growing season in the Artibonite Valley, other rice-farming areas, and wet mountain areas. This group of households in different farming areas, particularly in the Southern, Northern, Western, and Central regions, should be able to improve their food access between July and September.

In spite of the economic crises in destination countries for Haitian migrants, remittances to family members back home have not declined. Data for March of this year furnished by the Bank of the Republic of Haiti shows a slight increase in remittances to Haiti compared with figures for the same time last year. More specifically, the value of migrant remittances went from US\$115.6 million in March of 2011 to US\$122.5 million in 2012, a 5.6 percent increase. With all wealth groups benefiting from remittances, these funds definitely help strengthen the purchasing power of corresponding recipients, including poor households.

The hurricane season, which generally begins in June, is expected to be much less active than in the last two years, with a below-average number of storms. Forecasts for the Atlantic Basin released by the University of Colorado on April 4th predict ten named storms, including four hurricanes and two major hurricanes. This is a big improvement over last year's forecast predicting 16 tropical storms and a total of five major hurricanes. However, Haiti is fragile enough that any tropical cyclone striking the country, even those classified in the lowest category, could have catastrophic effects on food security in affected areas. The Southern peninsula, the Western region, and the Artibonite are most vulnerable to hurricane strikes. Contingency plans are already in place and simulations have been conducted to effectively assist the local population in the event of a hurricane strike.

Though this year's outlook appears to be better than last year's, certain areas are already facing food security problems. In fact, the far western reaches of the Northwestern region, certain municipalities in the upper Artibonite, and the Northeast have all lost their January and February harvests to the drought in these areas since October/November. This has scaled back farming activities, an important source of income, and driven up food prices. This is considered an arid area, receiving an average of 400 to 600 mm of rain each year and subject to long cyclical periods of drought. However, for some time now, the cycle has been getting shorter, heightening the vulnerability of area households to food insecurity.

Households living in camps and shantytowns in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area are also coping with food shortages, forcing them to resort to strategies such as migration and borrowing to meet their food needs. Poor households are already in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) and are liable to stay there until the next round of harvests in June and July. An improvement in conditions is expected by that time, continuing through the end of the outlook period in September and perhaps even thereafter, which will bring this group of households back into IPC Phase 1 (no acute food insecurity).

Trends in food security outcomes in monitoring areas

Upper Artibonite (Anse-rouge, Terre-Neuve, and Gros Morne)

The protracted drought in this area was responsible for the failure of sorghum crops, the mainstay of the diet of poor households between February and April/May. This year's mango harvest, which generally helps households get through the lean season, will be smaller than average. The continuing drought will delay the spring growing season which normally begins in March with land preparation activities but which, this year, could not get underway into the middle of April. The lean season, which generally runs from March/April to June, began in February/March in this part of the country due to the

failure of local crops. Markets along major arteries such as the Aux Poteaux road, relatively close to Gonaïves, are well stocked with local crops as well as imports, particularly grains and vegetables. Prices for items such as beans and fish are high compared with last year. Prices for local rice, corn, and sorghum are rising, and prices for imports are more or less stable.

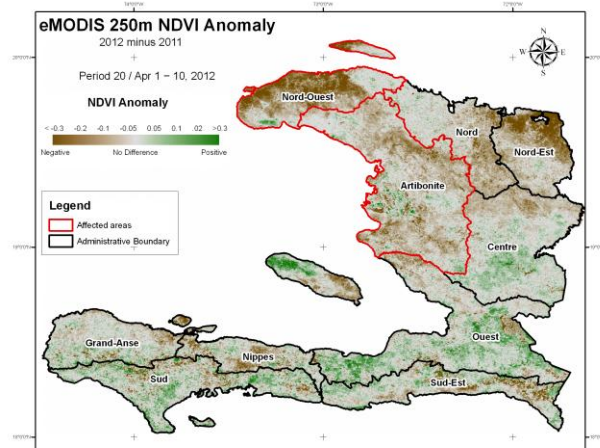
Poor households generally earn income from on-farm employment, crop production, livestock-raising, and charcoal production. However, the recent crop failure sharply reduced on-farm employment opportunities. Approximately two thirds of the income of poor households in this area comes from wage labor. On-farm production covers a quarter of their food needs. Thus, poor households having lost their sorghum and pigeon pea crops in January/February were also unable to find gainful employment in farming activities.

This season, poor households in the village of Savane Ragée in Anse-Rouge dependent on agriculture and sea salt production as their main sources of income are facing an unusual situation. According to local residents, the drought helped increase salt production, but demand is unchanged. This has caused the price of salt to plunge from 400 gourdes per sack in April of last year to 250 gourdes, the equivalent of three days work, which is eroding household purchasing power, particularly after the recent crop failure.

Adding to the effects of the drought responsible for the loss of January/February harvests, there is still a high likelihood of flooding in May in lowland areas or of landslides in steep areas, cutting roads and disrupting markets. A certain number of cholera cases were reported in March, even with the drought. These numbers are expected to surge between April and June, during the rainy season. Market-buying will be the main if not the only source of food for poor households for this entire period (April-June). Furthermore, there will be a smaller than usual mango harvest, which is an important source of income for all wealth groups in the month of May. With the beginning of the rains in mid-April, prices for corn and beans, in demand as sources of seeds, are on the rise, particularly in the absence of seed aid from the Ministry of Agriculture. Completely dependent on market-buying between April and June for their food supplies, poor households will turn to different types of survival mechanisms, the most important of which are increased charcoal production, by cutting down more trees, as well as labor migration, and sales of livestock or other assets as a way to survive in times of scarcity, as is oftentimes the case during periods of drought.

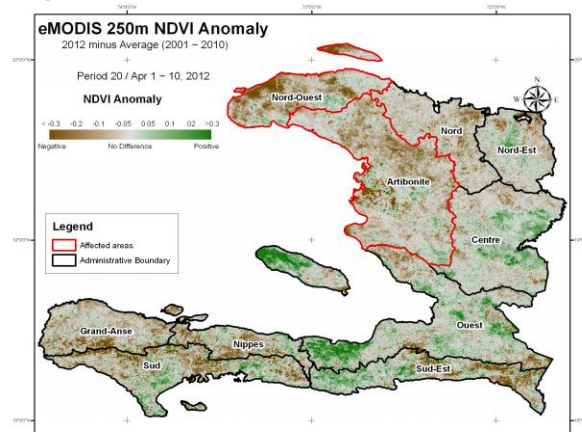
Poor households will remain in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) between April and June. The failure of pigeon pea and sorghum crops as a result of the drought depleted their food reserves, which could not be replenished in February, and sharply reduced the demand for labor on which so many of these households depend as a source of income. Further compounding these problems, most food prices, though stable, are quite high, particularly prices for corn, sorghum, and beans. Broken rice or poorer quality varieties of imported rice will be purchased by poor households as substitute foods. The coping strategies of poor households and outside interventions should help improve their circumstances, but will not suffice to adequately meet their food needs. Harvests of spring crops between July and September will help improve the food security situation of most poor households, thereby putting this part of the country in IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity).

Figure 2. Effect of the drought on vegetation in the Northwest in 2012, compared with 2011



Source: FEWS NET

Figure 2. Effect of the drought on vegetation in the Northwest in 2012, compared with the 2001-2010 average



Source: FEWS NET

Port-au-Prince metropolitan area

There are visibly fewer displaced persons still living in camps. Living conditions in camps and shantytown areas have been deteriorating since the beginning of the rainy season in March. Rice, oil, sugar, flour, bread, and beans account for 70 percent of the daily caloric intake of members of poor households in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area. In general, staple food prices are higher than at the same time last year, except for the prices of cooking oil and sugar, which have not changed. Prices for imported rice are stable, though these imports are being sold for slightly (approximately five percent) more than last year. Prices for locally grown corn and beans are up by 14 and eight percent, respectively, from April of last year.

Factors such as the rise of the U.S. dollar against the Haitian gourde and likely rises in fuel prices at the pump are liable to drive up the cost of food and public transportation over the next few months, as often happens with a hike in gas prices at the pump. The combination of these factors, a fresh cholera outbreak during the rainy seasons, flooding problems (disrupting market performance), and public demonstrations will undermine the food security situation, particularly for very poor and poor households. Current trends in food security conditions suggest that poor households in camps and shantytowns in the Port-au-Prince metropolitan area will be in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) between April and June. Even resorting to measures such as buying food on credit or diversifying their sources of income, they will still be facing food gaps. Conditions could improve between July and September with harvests of spring crops driving down food prices and outside interventions focused on improving sanitation systems in affected communities. Poor households should experience only minimal acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 1) during this period (July-September).

Far western reaches of the Northwest

There were virtually no harvests of winter corn, sorghum, and bean crops, which normally account for close to 40 percent of annual crop production in this area. The Northwest, which is subject to cyclical crop failures which have been coming increasingly close together in recent years, has been in the throes of a drought since October/November of last year. Land preparation activities which normally begin by February/March could not start up until mid-April, delaying the planting of spring crops.

According to a crop assessment mission conducted in mid-April by the CNSA and its partners, including FEWS NET, there is a shortage of seeds for the spring growing season. Market-buying is the main if not the only source of food for poor households at this time of year. Most market inventories consist of imports. Prices are high and, in the case of certain items, are even above figures for last March. Unlike last year, there are no ongoing labor-intensive public works programs. The ravine treatment projects which had been creating jobs were not extended due to a lack of funding. As a result, there are fewer employment opportunities for the poor. The main sources of income for poor households are charcoal production, small-scale livestock-raising, labor migration, and gifts. This group of households is unable to meet all its food needs and will be severely affected by hazards such as:

- Rises in food prices between April and June as a result of the poor winter harvest and the growing demand for grain and legumes to meet needs for seeds;
- Possible fresh cholera outbreaks in communities without proper water supply and sanitation systems in May, August, and September, which are generally extremely rainy periods.

These shocks will affect food access, by increasing prices, and/or food use, through the spreading of water-borne diseases in communities where sanitation presents a real challenge. In either case, this could create large unmet food needs, particularly for the poor. Poor households completely dependent on market-buying between April and June for their food supplies will be in IPC Phase 2 (stressed) due to the high price of food. Conditions will improve between July and September with harvests of spring crops, which will put these households back in IPC Phase 1 (minimal acute food insecurity).

Table 1. Less likely events which could change the most likely scenario in the next six months

Area	Event	Impact on food security
Nationwide	Hurricane strike, causing damage to crops	Problems maintaining food availability on domestic markets
Nationwide	Installation of the new government by May, creating a climate of trust.	Economic actors will take advantage of the situation to make investments, helping to create sustainable jobs.
Artibonite and Northwest Departments	Clearing of irrigation ditches to increase the size of areas planted in crops and aid to farmers to help them procure needed inputs for the main summer growing season	More production and job opportunities for the poor
Port-au-Prince metropolitan area	Relocation of DPs to more decent housing	These households are less exposed to the elements and less vulnerable to health problems